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#### Editorial

# The Houston women's conference

In the history of American women's struggle for equality, the National Women's Conference at Houston, Nov. 18-21, must rank as equal in importance to the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. which gave birth to the modern women's movement. In recent times the Houston conference far overshadows any other single such event relating to women's role in American society.

Indeed, in the potential implications of its program and in the number, diversity, and representative authority of the delegates and observers in attendance, the Conference is unparalleled in American political experience.

The Conference was also unusual in that it was mandated and paid for by Congress to advise it and the President on women's rights and affairs, but was not controlled by either the President or Congress.

Over three-fourths of the delegates were elected at public state and territorial conferences. Unlike the "counter-conference" delegates who were self-appointed, they represented substantial constituencies. Along with the 10,000-15,000 observers (who paid their own way) the conference participants comprised a congregation of unprecedented diversity-in age, income levels, occupations, racial and ethnic origin, opinion and creed-to such an extent that the phrase commonly heard among participants was "a rainbow of women.'

#### Rumors of death dispelled.

This diversity did not prevent an efficiently run conference or the adoption by solid majorities of a "National Plan of Action" for presentation to the President, Congress, and the American people. It encouraged and facilitated, on the other hand, a rich exchange of views, the striking of new friendships and organizational networks, and the emergence of new women political leaders.

The conference laid to rest all rumors of the death or decay of the women's movement. It made poor prophets of Phyllis Schlafly and her allies who had predicted the movement would come to an end at Houston, and who belied their own prediction by later complaining about the conference's unity. Against the diversity and heterogeneity of the delegates, the ideological and social homogeneity of the "counter-conference" delegates stood out in stark contrast. If anything died at Houston, it was the myth of the power or popularity of the antifeminist right. The unity on program at the conference rests on solid social circumstances. First, the inequality of opportunity, treatment, and condition that all women suffer. Second, the accelerated entry of women into the world of work outside the home (49 percent of all women 16 years of age and older are in the work force, and 41 percent of the full-time work force are women), and the fact that the overwhelming majority of working women are wage or salary earning employees, not capitalists or employers. These two circumstances operate powerfully in generating common needs and common programmatic responses.



主任他们已经来的演出不是

can women, and increasingly of the women's movement (as Liz Carpenter of ERAmerica said, "We can no longer be accused of being a middle-class white women's cause''), was punctuated by the prominent role of labor movement women, especially the Coalition of Labor Union Women, not only at Houston, but also at the state conferences that selected delegates. The conference will very likely strengthen the bonds among general women's organizations, the labor

themes.

"counter-conference" rightists focused ier said than done, but saying is a first their attack for media purposes on the step to doing.

much as "pro-family" or "pro-life" "Everybody was saying, "Why do we have to go through Carter to the Con-The opposition delegates and the gress? We could be the Congress'." Eas-

ERA (which the conference overwhelm- The National Plan will now serve as a ingly reaffirmed), abortion, and homo- program around which to organize, just sexual rights. The conference majority as the conference itself re-energized the were not intimidated. "Moderates" and women's movement and established new "militants" joined in upholding principle political alliances and networks within against the temptations of a convenient and among the states. It represents the opportunism. This demonstrated the ma- adoption by a "mainstream" coalition

The recent movements of blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans have also had their educative effect. From their own experience as well women are especially sensitive to the injustices suffered on account of circumstance of birth, and the conference delegates were particularly receptive to the programmatic proposals of minority delegates (who made up one-third of the total, a larger minorities' representation than at any previous comparable gathering).

The prevalent class composition of

No.

movement, and minorities' movements.

The 25-point National Plan of Action is indicative. Most of the resolutions passed were addressed to the conditions of working women. They ranged from demands for a full employment economy, a national health security system, social security and welfare reforms, a guaranteed annual income, unionization of unorganized working women, and transfer of spending from military to social purposes, to programs concerning child care, homemakers, educational opportunity. older women, rural women, the disabled, the battered, the imprisoned. Other programs such as those concerning the arts and humanities, the media, credit, insurance, victims of rape, and aid to small business women appeal to working class and non-working class women alike.

But the general thrust of the National Plan is toward social goals facilitated by a government (at all levels) to be made into one that is of, by, and for the people, as against market values and corporate investment priorities. In the debate on conference resolutions, the opposition delegates within the conference, like the "counter-conference" participants, were responding to something real when they. defended the "free enterprise" system as turity and growing self-confidence of the of organizations and individuals of what women's movement, among newcomers was five years ago the Feminist agenda. The feminist movement has shown as well as veterans.

The challenge to the corporate system how to achieve unity in diversity, and implicit in the National Plan will inevit- more, the greater strength of a unity that ably draw resistance from the legislatures welcomes and sustains diversity. The and Congress as now constituted, and feminists have also shown that the way from President Carter. It will also lead to spread new (or revolutionary) ideas to division in the women's movement. and to build organized strength around Such resistance and division, however, them is not to hide them in a closet or need not weaken the equalitarian wing defer them until a future that never of the women's movement, which is po- comes, but to talk about them with othtentially the majority. They may, on the ers, write about them, agitate, persuade, contrary, strengthen it by further clari- and convince. They have shown how to fying the issues and the real stakes in fully reach out to people in popular style withachieving women's rights, and by quick- out foresaking principles. Not being afraid ening alliances with the poor, minorites, of the American people, nor of ridicule and labor.

#### Learning from feminists.

As the National Plan focuses on legisla- popular judgment. tive programs and hence on electoral politics, the challenge implicit in it will re- politically wise and realistic to have conquire the emergence of new political lead- fidence in "the hearts, minds and moral ers rooted in working class interests (a consciences of men and women and what process already evident at the conference), they [may] do to make our society truly and the transformation of the legislative democratic and open to all." ("Declarabranches by the election of such leaders, tion of American Women," Houston both women and men. Karen DeCrow, Conference).

or temporary rejection, they have persisted in the courage of their convictions while submitting them and themselves to

The feminists have shown that it is

ex-president of the National Organization . . , We socialists have a lot to learn from for Women said as much in observing: the feminists.

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#### IN THESE TIMES DEC. 6-12, 1977 15

## Letters

#### **Bia**s?

#### Editor.

Your persitant bias in Middle East coverage approaches an ideological position.

Front page: 'Sadat trip: Triumph or Tragedy?' (*ITT*, Nov. 23). How could what may be the most substantive step toward peace yet be a tragedy? You imply, without ever saying why, some sort of terrible mistrust.

Inside header: 'Had the Begin regime known that Sadat would accept their invitation, they might not have invited him Now Begin is on the spot: he must show that he is willing to promote peace.' Both sentences are false both explicitly and implicitly. (What other parliamentary coalition with a narrow majority would you characterize as a 'regime'?)

The entire Begin-Sadat show (and, among other things, it was a show) has obviously been in careful secret production for months. Clearly, one of the requisites of a real peace will be many people giving each other a lot of face. Give both sides some credit.

Begin's leadership has (or can be claimed to have) already begun to prove itself with a more promising move toward peace than any in decades; how can you question any Israeli leader's 'willingness' for peace? (How, also, can you miss that constructive moves begin to take place almost as soon as we're rid of Henry Kissinger?) Sadat has put his ass on the line by alienating most of his neighbors, in hopes of being able to devote more of his bankrupt country's meager resources to her terrible problems. If, God forbid, this fails, he'll be out of office long before Begin.

Your consistency with such blindness raises questions about your judgment in general, though I've never seen such nonsense in the paper on any other topic. -Neil Rest

Chicaao

### Neither stupidity nor cruelty is productive or desirable

#### Editor:

I must express my appreciation of Hans Koning's thoughtful article (*ITT*, Nov. 9). It is, to my mind, an oasis of rational left analysis in a wasteland of "liberal" and "ultra left" claptrap. Both of the above seem to be intent on

#### Rye, barley or com?

#### Editor:

The editors' (*ITT*, Nov. 16) stated desire to see the American socialist movement "gain moral authority" makes me nervous. It makes me want to examine more closely the ideological processes to which readers of *ITT* submit their thought.

It reminds me that the social theories of Puritanism—speaking of the "American grain"—were based on the collective will of regenerate men. And led to the spectacle of Salem. It calls up old fears, not so much of priests but of congregations, of the elect, of the sinister aspects of righteousness.

It reminds me of Temperance and the Great Revival.

It reminds me, too, of the insignia on the belt buckles of Hitler's army: "God with us."

It reminds me that the manipulation of material in accordance with some notion of order is an artistic, and potentially dangerous (see Plato for this) process.

And it makes me want to remind the editors that putting out a newspaper like rain-making or novel-writing—is a trade. Let's keep it at that.

#### -Maureen Muliarkey Brooklyn, N.Y.

Editor's note: Golly. When we wrote of moral authority we had in mind political leadership based on the public enunciation of principles and program. Like Thomas Jefferson, Fidel Castro, Rosa Luxemburg, or maybe Abraham Lincoln, V.I. Lenin, Paul Robeson More like that. Anyway, IN THESE TIMES is not the American socialist movement, only a small part of it.

#### Gaspacho

Editor:

If the readers of this newspaper are so smart, how come they write so many dumb letters to this guy Mark Naison? They complain about macho, nacho and smacho—what's that got to do with sports? None of them mentioned the fact that this guy Naison picked Jimmy Conners to win at Forest Hills, the 76ers to win in the NBA and Philly to take the World Series.

Now we read this newspaper because it seems smart and we're looking for smart things to bet on, but so far we're down \$500. If you've got any brains you'll get rid of Naison and get someone who can pick a winner. And try to make sure the next one isn't some guy who voted for McGovern in '76.

> -Abe Garbanzo & friends Brooklyn, N.Y.

#### We pass the test of (a short) time

Editor:

Reminiscent of the Sunday afternoon rivalries between Pittsburgh and Oakland, Naison and Russell waited 'til Rosenblum got the ball and then proceeded to disregard all rules of fair play to throw the guy for an 18 yard loss. Instead of tactics like unnecessary roughness, holding and unsportsmanlike conduct, your commentators used words such as "onesided explanation," "condescension," and "a trace of class prejudice."

George Atkinson has got to be smiling.

As one who considers sports a major part of his life, I see the value of physical self-improvement and creative, non-sexist self-expression.

But Rosenblum brings out some important points regarding the hegemony of the sports "ethic" on working class males (and females too). This point can't be ignored if we are critically to analyze sports in our society.

In the end, Rosenblum's lack of an alternative is not resolved by your dissenting commentators. Instead of a vision of what sports would be like in a socialist society, Naison and Russell chose an aggressive game-plan—which is too bad, because I'm sure that is not where their values lie.

You still haven't given me a good radical analysis of sports. But keep trying, I need you. -Andy Goutman Philadelphia

#### Heartened

#### Editor:

Although I think your paper is at times a bit on the reformist side (who really cares about the latest machinations in the Democratic party?!), the article by Pete Karman, "The joy of sects: a handy guide" (*ITT*, Nov. 23), was almost worth the subscription price in and of itself. Karman did, however, make one error that will have serious consequences for the Movement: he failed to point out that whoever gets the Chinese contract has semi-exclusive rights to the sale of stuffed Panda teddy-bears. These make excellent Christmas gifts for leftists who have little.sisters.

> -William J. Volonte Charlottesville, Va.

#### Disheartened

#### Editor:

Recently you printed your statement of policy. Have you forgotten its contents so soon? On Nov. 23 you saw fit to print an article by Pete Karman of questionable humor and taste.

It is most discouraging evidence that the ones responsible for editing *ITT* have much to learn. Is this type of ridicule of small, weak organizations calculated to encourage people to work, to get together under the banner of *ITT*? I found Pete Karman's article infantile and sickening. Surely you must know that many of your readers are connected with the organizations mentioned. How would you think this type of appraisal of their efforts would hit them? What can be learned from this type of cheap "journalism"?

highly-spirited, diverse group of people, referring to "socialists of all stripes," agitation for a demonstration, and a final quote from Maggie Kuhn: "We are on a pilgrimage but also a lark." This was edited out. If it was a question of space, surely elimination of the head ing "Senior Citizens" would have solved the problem with more regard for the spirit of the convention.

> -Ruth Dear Oak Park, III.

### Their business owns our government

#### Editor:

Kirkpatrick (Letters, *ITT*, Nov. 16) overlooks the main issue. Rotten as it is, it is *our* government versus *their* businesses. The reason for the bureaucratic boondogles, contradictory rules and inefficiency is that corporate business men will not allow the American republic to function. You see, it is not in the best interest of business to have a government that truly represents the American people. Business has expropriated the constitutional rights of the American people.

-Art Liebrez Annandale, Va.

#### Organizing domestic workers

#### Editor:

The "housekeepers" joining IBT in New York (*ITT*, Nov. 30) are not the first such to organize if the term refers to those who hire out to do other people's housework.

Back in 1900 Max Hayes reported in the International Socialist Review (Vol. I, p. 816) that Mother Jones was "forming a union of domestic servants" in Scranton, Pa. In 1916 Jane Street organized a large number of "housemaids" in Denver into the IWW. Her technique included a club for them to rap with each other on the traditional Thursday afternoon off, and a card index on employers that grew to describe the salaries paid by 2,500 local employers of maids, the number of people in each home, kind of work, characteristics of the mistresses, turnover record, etc.

Cartoons in the Denver Post depicted the Wobbly maids as starching the handkerchiefs and underwear of recalcitrant employers (See The IWW: Its First 70 Years, page 101.) I recall items of 1970 or 1971 about an organization through the Southwest that referred to their occupation as "household technicians"; I also recall instances of YWCA making efforts to set minimum job conditions for housemaids, but without collective bargaining.

> -Fred Thompsen Chicago More letters on page 17.

Editor's Note: Please try to keep letters

reducing the issue of terrorism to emotional "us/them" simplicities.

It's both refreshing and encouraging to find someone willing to expose the contradictions inherent in the "enlightened" attitudes current among liberals without calling for near deification of the slain guerillas.

Anyone who professes to hold a rational view of socialism must recognize that stupidity and cruelty are neither productive nor desirable. The fact that a number of individuals are slain in pursuance of actions both stupid and cruel in no fashion salvages them from disrepute.

However, it certainly does not follow that we should join with hysterical reaction in calling for suppression at any cost. Recent history provides us with ample illustrations of where we can expect that road to lead us.

As a socialist I oppose the oppression of my fellow human beings through violence. As a Marxist I recognize the eventual necessity of defensive violence.

Thanks again to both Hans and you for raising this discussion above the level of wretched cliches. -W.B. Reeves

**-W.B. Reeves** Atlanta, Ga. I have given your newspaper a year now to be disappointing enough for me to quit buying each week, either from trite yellow journalism, political pressures or the ugly, uneconomic facts of publishing a newspaper. Well, you made a year, stronger and more pleasing than ever to a needy ear. If communication is going to have any real significance in social progress, it's about time.

I've particularly enjoyed the publicity/ information on local groups' efforts and achievements. The result of co-operation and mutual benefit is showing its merit everywhere, in these times. Please add me to your list of regular subscribers.

> -Dennis A. Fuze Pittsburgh

#### Foul!

Editor:

In their collective attempts to be "good sports," "Would you shoot yourself over fumbles?" (*ITT*, Nov. 16), it appears Naison and Russell set Rosenblum up with the kind of intimidation that would make St. Louis Cardinals lineman Conrad Dobler proud. It leaves one very disheartened at the very long journey ahead.

-Tiba G. Willner Santa Cruz, Calif.

Editor's note: We have always thought that humor is a way of engaging in selfcriticism and attaining a healthy perspective on ourselves.

#### To the "Junior Citizens" of In These Times

#### Editor:

After carefully mentioning in my article on the Gray Panther national convention (*ITT*, Nov. 25) that one-third of the delegates were young people, I find that you have put us in the ageist category of "Senior Citizens"! We are an activist group involving people of all ages in the fight against the particular oppression of old people.

I had hoped to give a feeling of a busy,

under 250 words in length. Otherwise we have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

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